

Since 1982, the National Endowment for the Arts has honored our nation's master folk and traditional artists with the National Heritage Fellowship. This lifetime achievement award recognizes the ways these individuals demonstrate and reflect our nation's living cultural heritage and the efforts of these artists to share their knowledge with the next generation. The National Heritage Fellowships celebrate the vitality of America's folk and traditional arts, supporting ethnic and cultural diversity as a strength national of character.

Number of
NEA National
Heritage
Fellowships,
1982-2020:

449

HONORING THE MASTERS

The National Heritage Fellowships help to sustain artistic traditions of culturally-distinct communities and promote the vitality of those traditions.

Past recipients include:

- ballad singer, musician, and storyteller Sheila Kay Adams
- oud player and composer Rahim AlHaj
- quilters of Gee's Bend Mary Lee Bendolph, Lucy Mingo, and Loretta Pettway
- Irish-American fiddler Liz Carroll
- Kathak dancer and choreographer Chitresh Das
- Cajun fiddler and composer Michael Doucet
- sweetgrass basketweaver Mary Jackson
- bluesman B.B. King
- Lakota flute player/singer/dancer Kevin Locke
- cowboy poet Wally McRae
- bluegrass musician Bill Monroe
- gospel and soul singer Mavis Staples

In 2000, the National Endowment for the Arts inaugurated the Bess Lomax Hawes National Heritage Fellowship, given to an individual for achievements in fostering excellence, ensuring vitality, and promoting public appreciation of the folk and traditional arts. Recipients include:

- quilting community advocate Carolyn Mazloomi
- musician, cultural scholar and advocate Mike Seeger
- ethnomusicologist and folklorist Daniel Sheehy

Anyone can nominate an artist to be considered for a fellowship. Fellowship recipients are nominated by the public, often by members of their own communities, and then judged by a panel of experts in folk and traditional arts on the basis of their continuing artistic accomplishments and contributions as practitioners and teachers. The Arts Endowment awards up to nine National Heritage Fellowships each year, with each recipient receiving a one-time award of up to \$25,000.



CONNECTING THE MASTERS TO THE AUDIENCES

To give the public an opportunity to learn more about the National Heritage Fellows and their art forms, each year the National Endowment for the Arts holds a public event in honor of that year's recipients.

The celebration of the 2020 National Heritage Fellows will be held virtually in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. More information about this event, including the date, will be available at a later time.

CREATING AND SHARING CONTENT

- In addition, the [National Endowment for the Arts website](#) contains a wealth of content about the National Heritage Fellows, including:
 - [Bios, photos, and interviews](#)
 - [Podcasts](#)
 - [Video](#) from past Heritage Fellowships Concerts
 - [Photos](#) from past National Heritage Fellowships Events
 - [Portraits](#) by photographer Tom Pich of more than 200 National Heritage Fellows in their homes, studios, and at sites that most vividly reflect the essence of their artwork

“Of all activities assisted by the Folk Arts program, these Fellowships are among the most appreciated and applauded, perhaps because they present to Americans a vision of themselves and of their country, a vision somewhat idealized but profoundly longed for and so, in significant ways, profoundly true.”

—**Bess Lomax Hawes**, director, NEA Folk & Traditional Arts, 1977-1992

